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Penny Sparke, Anne Massey, Trevor Keeble, and Brenda Martin (eds.), *Designing the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today*

Designing the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today by Penny Sparke; Anne Massey; Trevor Keeble; Brenda Martin

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within a year of this auspicious event it was making export arrangements with Western companies. By the 1970s Iskra was supplying electronic components for Bosch, Renault, and Volkswagen, as well as staking out patents and winning international awards for its own designs. This duality is understood by the authors of this book as a reflection of Yugoslavia’s non-aligned status. The country was home to the first conference of Non-Aligned Countries in 1961, a union of progressive states which refused to fall into either camp in the Cold War. No doubt Josip Broz Tito addressed the assembled leaders through a well-crafted Iskra microphone.

Iskra represented—as Predan shows—an attempt to bring capitalist know-how to a socialist production. “Numerous factors—the planned economy, self-management, the consensus economy, the enthusiasm after the defeat of Fascism and Nazism, the desire for a new society built on a more equitable (and industrialized) foundation—made it possible for Iskra even to come into being,” she writes. “In the period of socialism [Iskra] employed all the methodological tools that were being used in Western markets” (pp. 56–57). What these instruments meant to those who employed them was ambiguous. On the evidence presented in this well-researched book, it seems that advertising and marketing were not viewed as innately capitalist and, as such, did not produce the kind of fetishistic desires that Marx so roundly criticized in *Capital*. From the technocratic perspective of Iskra’s designers and technicians, they were merely tools, much like ergonomics or information design.

Stane Bernik, writing in an Iskra exhibition catalogue in the Design Centre in Stuttgart in 1971, put the company ethos in relatively clear, if less than concise, terms: “Industrial design, or rather, the philosophy in which it is grounded, is becoming the driving force of the progressive side of the manufacturing process through which an ideology of design as a possibility for the world today and tomorrow is being established—a design that rests on the sort of material culture that is the result of the active functions of a living environment that is, in an artistic sense, more richly motivated and realized” (p. 51). No loyal Yugoslav ideologue could disagree with his sentiment. Moreover, his words were in harmony with the lofty aspiration of humanist designers elsewhere in the world too. They could have been delivered at

the Aspen conferences in the 1960s or issued from the mouths of Braun’s designers. Much the same can be said of the company’s products. They spoke the same kind of international design Esperanto as Olivetti, IBM, and Braun’s goods.

In the third major essay in the book, British design historian Jonathan Woodham surveys the international context of Iskra’s operations, discussing visits and meeting with representatives of international NGOs and professional associations. In the approving reports from British representatives of the Design Council and design bureaucrats that he cites, one can almost detect envy. These commentators understood efficient products stripped of unnecessary styling, teamwork between designers and engineers, and the steer that comes from a “rationally” organized economy as the prerequisites of “Good Design.”

Looking carefully at the products which feature in this publication, one begins to wonder about their ideological functions as well as their practical operations. The monumental 35mm movie projectors that came off the company’s production lines from the late 1940s were joined in turn by trim 8mm home projectors in 1963. Was this a shift from the projection of Stalinist propaganda to the promise of socialist consumerism? In this, can we detect a move from public culture (the cinema) to a private one (home)? Who determined the need for such things? In similar fashion one might ask, what was the impetus behind the investment in experimental engineering products? Cybernetic systems, for instance, had been the holy grail of the planned economy throughout Eastern Europe in the 1960s. The aim of managing the uneven relations of production and demand with computers, or of regulated mechanical operations on an assembly line, had been claimed as the means to stir command economies out of stagnancy. By the 1980s most of the countries in the Eastern Bloc had virtually given up this hope. Did the *Roki 200*, Iskra’s cybernetic robot unveiled at the Hanover trade fair in 1988, represent the last outing of this socialist high-tech fantasy?

Since the end of the Yugoslav wars of the mid-1990s, the material culture of the Tito era has been wrapped in its own particular brand of Yugo-nostalgia. Food, packaging, music, and even holiday resorts have been the subject of considerable sentiment. The stability of this “golden age” has high appeal in

societies that have seen war and economic collapse. Iskra’s products don’t seem to have been adopted in this fashion. In fact, in his introduction to this book, Špela Šubic complains that Iskra risks being forgotten, not least by the inheritor companies that were formed from Iskra’s remains at the end of communist rule. Why they should be exempt from the taste for socialist kitsch is an intriguing question: could it be that the designers’ emphasis on the functional and rational forms affords little purchase to such desires? Perhaps in this regard, at least, they behave like “good” socialist things, stifling this particular form of commodity fetishism.

■

David Crowley

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Designing the Modern Interior: From the Victorians to Today

Edited by Penny Sparke, Anne Massey, Trevor Keeble, and Brenda Martin



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In 1967 Hugh Casson, then head of the newly established interior design course at the Royal College of Art, remarked: “Many architects refuse to believe that such a thing as interior design exists at all. Some place it on a par with the art of the milliner or pastry cook; others seem to regard its claims for separation as a personal affront.”¹ Over the last decade or so a rapidly expanding body of literature has finally sought to counter the marginalized status that interior design suffered through much of the twentieth century, demonstrating that the interior is not only a significant and distinct part of the cultural landscape but that it must be understood as more than the simple spatial and structural organization of a building’s interior.

Designing the Modern Interior pulls together seventeen essays by some of the most notable scholars working within this field and—while their disciplinary backgrounds are drawn mainly from design, art, and architectural history—the range of perspectives and methodological approaches employed suggests the wide scope of the subject matter. Spanning the period 1870 to the present, the book opens with a useful introductory essay by Penny Sparke and is

then organized chronologically into four sections (The Late Nineteenth Century Interior; The Early Twentieth Century Interior; The Mid Twentieth Century Interior; and the Late Twentieth Century Interior), each with its own introductory essay.

Throughout the anthology a number of key issues that have arisen out of the study of the interior are addressed, including the relationship between public and private space, the tension between professional and amateur interventions, gender, the role of taste, and the relationship between modernity, the mass media, and mass consumption. Related to this, the intertwining of self-identity and interior design is revisited in a number of the essays, as is the issue of national identity. The book's aim to expand the notion of the "modern" interior as it has generally been conceived within architectural and design history ties these issues together. Thus, rather than align it with the stylistic manifestations of canonical modernism, the modern interior is instead viewed as an *expression* of the experience of modernity.

The diversity of the interiors discussed—which encompasses a number of modernist icons but also Victorian public houses, ocean liners, Japanese love hotels, and the suburban home of a retired couple—not only marks it out from other books on the subject but also serves to negate any sense of an evolutionary stylistic process, typical of modernist histories and most survey books on the history of interior design. Indeed, as Sparke claims, while a preoccupation with conventional modernist interiors has not completely vanished, "[it] has, however, been rendered more complex, more contextualized and broadened" (p. 7).

Certainly, the anthology includes a number of excellent alternative readings of modernist interiors, such as Hilde Heynen's analysis of the Rietveld Schröder House, which seeks to reassess the claims made by Heidegger and Adorno that modernity and the dwelling are at odds. While this is not the first time the Rietveld Schröder House has been highlighted as an example of modernist design that sympathetically attends to the demands of domesticity—Alice Friedman documented the key role played by Truus Schröder in her book *Women and the Making of the Modern House*—Heynen's essay, which draws on Walter Benjamin's idea of the dwelling as "process," provides a sensitive analysis of the physical traces of domesticity within the

modern abstract space, adding a new dimension to Friedman's original study.² In contrast to Heynen's essay, which argues that modernist interiors were often antithetical to domesticity, Irene Nierhaus argues that even the interiors of Mies van der Rohe contain levels of intimacy and privacy as well as decoration, if they are read in a particular way. Taking Mies van der Rohe's interior scheme in the Villa Tugendhat, in Brno, she convincingly argues that the use of polished and reflective surfaces provides an alternative form of decoration that offsets the apparent severity of design. Although not entirely original (these points have been raised with regard to the domestic interiors of both Mies and Adolf Loos before now), she goes on to argue that through "the reflections and shades, the inhabitants enter the image and become part of the living space surface" (p. 116). Like Nierhaus, Peter Blundell Jones also animates the historical interior in his essay by examining the four-dimensional nature of Hans Scharoun's domestic architecture projects—pointing to the way in which an interior is experienced in time and in movement, as well as in space.

In addition to those essays that readdress conventional readings of modernist interiors, this anthology places strong emphasis on alternative expressions of modernity. In the first section of the book Trevor Keeble, in an analysis of Lewis F. Day's lecture "Commonsense House Decoration" (1883), and Sabine Wieber, on two rooms designed by Martin Dülfer and Theodore Fischer displayed in the Glaspalast at Munich's Seventh International Art Exhibition of 1897, both argue that instead of viewing nineteenth-century design through the lens of proto-modernism, historians should instead focus on examining how interiors were "received at the time and how they were postulated as cultural responses to the condition of modernity and modern life" (p. 53). This is surely becoming the accepted approach in serious studies of the later nineteenth- and twentieth-century domestic interior, so in many respects the authors are kicking against an open door. Nevertheless, it does no harm to restate what should be a principle of historical method in this field. Complementing these two essays is Fiona Fischer's examination of English public houses, which demonstrates the impact of the very modern preoccupations with regulation, self-autonomy, and social status on the design of these spaces.

In the second part of the anthology, Christopher Reed's essay, "Taking Amusement Seriously: Modern Design in the Twenties," reveals in the pages of *Vogue* a "homegrown style of British modernism" (p. 81) that reiterates the central claim of the book—that the canonic modernist interior was only one of a number of competing "ideologies of what it meant to be modern" (p. 90). Alice Friedman likewise adds to this picture in her analysis of the resort hotels of Miami Beach in the 1950s, which she argues materially embodied the consumer dreams American modernity had promised (p. 205). Returning to Reed's essay, however, what is particularly powerful about his analysis is his claim that the "Amusing Style," with its "theatricality, humour, and an emphasis on artifice and playfulness" (p. 81), was consigned to historical obscurity by the design establishment, in favor of interiors that emphasised functional rationalism, because of anxieties about gender and sexuality. In so doing he places discourses about gender and sexuality at the heart of debates about design in the 1920s, demonstrating the extent to which they structured the course of design history and that of the domestic interior in particular.

While the case studies themselves are tightly argued and meticulously researched, the introductory essays are invaluable to the student of the interior, providing an excellent overview of the historiography of the subject and the disciplinary approaches employed. Perhaps inevitably, though, for an anthology this ambitious, more issues are raised than can be addressed. For example, in the introduction to the mid-twentieth century section (1940–70) Penny Sparke observes the growth of the DIY movement and the growing number of middle class and upper working class homeowners who wanted to express their modernity through their domestic spaces. Yet there is no essay specifically dedicated to DIY in this or the last section of the book, which seems surprising given the significance of the subject and the quality of research in this area.³

That said, Elizabeth Darling's essay on two interior design schemes by the modernist architect Wells Coates echoes Sparke's discussion around the growing significance of consumption, as she includes within her analysis a careful consideration of the specific psychological and social needs of the individuals who commissioned work from the Canadian architect-designer. This leads her to

read the new interiors as a backdrop or stage set against which the inhabitants could act out and project their modernity. While these were far from "ordinary" middle class homes, Darling nonetheless demonstrates the ways in which interior design, identity formation, and expressions of modernity came together. Interestingly, she also traces how photographs of the interiors continued to be reproduced in the contemporary media, providing some sense of the double life of the interior as a lived experience, a physical space, and a disembodied image—a subject that Charles Rice also addresses in his essay on architectural drawings of modernist homes in Australia.

What is impressive about this anthology—and what distinguishes it from another recent publication by Penny Sparke entitled *The Modern Interior*, which takes a similarly broad view of the "modern"—is the range of methodological approaches and perspectives it incorporates, all of which serve to cast the interior in various guises; it can be a site of social regulation or a stage set, a place to consume one's fantasies or to store up material memories.⁴ Finding space to unpack and examine the many methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives in anything other than a cursory way is, however, difficult. Sparke, for example, in her essay, an overview of Italian design between 1945 and 1972, draws attention to the conceptual approach taken by Gae Aulenti, Ettore Sottsass Jr., and Joe Colombo in their "house-environments," suggesting that "it was behaviours rather than images, objects or even spaces that mattered" to their visions of the home (p. 192). Unfortunately, the limits imposed by the anthology prevent further discussion of this approach or other theories of space that are addressed within essays elsewhere in the book. Similarly, Trevor Keeble suggests in the introduction to the final section (covering the period 1970 to the present) that the interior remained neglected as an area of academic enquiry in part because of "its often complex and collective 'authorship,' its domestic or commercial contexts and its transient and evolutionary nature" (p. 220). Yet there is relatively limited space to discuss the continuing methodological challenges attached to studying such a "transient" subject.⁵

Once again, it could be argued that these challenges are addressed through the example of the

case studies. Anne Massey’s essay, for instance, on the design of ocean liners, provides a detailed exposé of the complex and collective design process involved, while Alison Clarke’s essay, examining the home furnishing choices of a retired couple, high-lights the transitory nature of a domestic interior and the way in which stylistic aspirations and biographic memories structure its evolution. Like Clarke, Pat Kirkham’s essay on the Eames House in Pacific Palisades, California, also emphasizes the active and ongoing construction of interior spaces by their inhabitants as she analyzes the way in which the couple used their home to entertain. In this, both Clarke’s and Kirkham’s essays exemplify the influence of material culture studies, noted by Keeble in his introductory essay, as the interior is viewed as a performative setting, which is an ongoing process requiring constant work.

What is less evident in the anthology is the way in which material culture studies has sought to uncover the normative practices that structure the domestic interior.⁶ While Keeble suggests, correctly, that much of this work ignores the importance of style and aesthetics, and can tend toward a synchronic analysis of the interior, there are some notable examples where the demands of both are interwoven with excellent results. Judy Attfield’s seminal essay “Inside Pram Town: A Case Study of Harlow House Interiors, 1951–1961,”⁷ for example, explored the ways in which women responded to “modern” open plan living and the strategies of resistance they developed as a means to appropriate “modernity to their *own designs* [my italics].”⁸ A little more analysis of such “ordinary” interiors would have been a welcome addition.

Of course an anthology must draw its boundaries somewhere, and *Designing the Modern Interior* pulls together essays that both extend and refine existing (albeit dispersed) works of historiographic significance as well as essays that present new research, providing a stimulating and authoritative introduction to the history of the modern interior. Indeed, the quality of research—in particular the detailed archival research—is excellent throughout, and where the anthology is particularly successful is in its “spatialization” of history, which, as Sparke claims, leads to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the subject. This is backed up by extensive endnotes and a

select bibliography that provide a rich source of information to any student wishing to learn more. With one hundred illustrations and an engagingly lucid text, *Designing the Modern Interior* should be essential reading for such students. While some of the essays and issues raised might leave those more familiar with the subject desirous of longer and more extended analyses, this should not be read as a criticism; rather it is an acknowledgment that the subject of this quality work warrants further investigation and publication.

■

¹ Quoted in Anne Massey, *Interior Design Since 1900*, rev. ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 161.

² Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).

³ For example, see David Bell and Joanne Hollows, eds., *Ordinary Lifestyles: Popular Media, Consumption and Taste* (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2005).

⁴ Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion, 2008).

⁵ See, for example, Suzie Attiwill’s criticism that design history provides inadequate analysis of the temporal and spatial nature of interior design because it privileges the visual aspects of the interior and views it in terms of enclosure and containment rather than recognizing the more contingent and conceptual nature of what an interior might be. Suzie Attiwill, “Towards an Interior History,” *IDEA Journal* 1 (2004): 1–8.

⁶ For example, see Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey, eds., *Ideal Homes?: Social Change and Domestic Life* (London: Routledge, 1999); Sarah Pink, *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects, and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Elizabeth Shove, Matthew Watson, Martin Hand, and Jack Ingram, eds., *The Design of Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

⁷ In Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham, eds., *A View from the Interior: Women and Design*, 2nd ed. (London: Women’s Press, 1995).

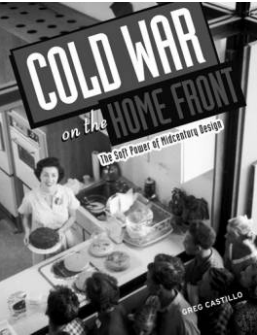
⁸ Judy Attfield, “Bringing Modernity Home: Open Plan Living in the British Domestic Interior,” in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 73–81. A more recent work that takes up some of Attfield’s findings is Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd’s *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), which—although written from the perspective of the social sciences—examines the new “visuality of home-making” in the postwar era through an analysis of advice literature, magazines, and advertisements, making it highly relevant to the study of the modern interior.

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Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design

Greg Castillo



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Scholars have long recognized the centrality of the home in Cold War discourse. They have also broad-ened research into the Cold War by looking at design and daily life behind the iron curtain. David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, and others have brought the design and material culture of the Eastern Bloc to the fore, and the Victoria and Albert Museum’s exhibition *Cold War Modern: Design, 1945–1970*, curated by Crowley and Jane Pavitt with contributions by Reid and Greg Castillo, dedicated a significant portion of the exhibi-tion and its catalogue to designs from Eastern Eu-rope.¹ In *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*, architectural historian Greg Castillo continues this trend, offering an informed reading of the interiors and material artifacts exhib-ited at trade fairs and exhibitions held in divided Ger-many and elsewhere. He situates the Cold War home and its material culture at the center of the ideological battle between the United States and the Soviet Union, and reinforces Beatriz Colomina’s argument that “everything in the postwar age was domestic.”² Castillo elaborates on the work of historian Robert H. Haddow and expands our understanding of trade fairs and exhibitions by breaking down the polemic of

consumerism versus communism as a Cold War con-struct.³ In its place, he reveals the complex relation-ship of consumption, domesticity, and midcentury modernism with the self-representation of both the East *and* the West.

As Marshall Plan organizers sought to sway for-ign citizens with the pleasures of privatized capital-ist consumption, Eastern Bloc governments hoped to counter the allure through domestic displays of their own. Castillo relies on archival materials, as well as on German and American period journals, maga-zines, and fiction, and convincingly applies political scientist Joseph Nye’s dichotomy of “hard” and “soft” power as his organizing methodology. According to Nye, hard power controls and coerces through overt displays and tactics, such as occupation and trade embargos, while soft power beckons and beguiles through intangibles, such as culture and belief systems. The allure of soft power rests in its capacity for appropriation and adaptation by foreign recipients, who, while promoting their own interests, also promote the interests of the generating nation. For Castillo, then, the home, as exhibited throughout the postwar period, was a “Trojan House” (p. 139) of sorts, leading to the fateful exchange in the American kitchen between Vice President Richard M. Nixon and Premier Nikita Khrushchev at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow. That exchange, held amid washing machines, hi-fi units, and other prod-ucts of capitalist labor, Castillo argues, represented not the inception but rather the culmination of an ongoing ideological battle about the relative merits of consumption. Its legacy is nothing less than the single globalized economy we live in today.

After the Second World War, citizens of both East and West Germany perceived the heritage of the avant-garde as increasingly irrelevant, and even retrograde. By the 1950s the *Existenzminimum* home was replaced in the socialist East by a distrust of modernism and an embrace of neoclassicism. In the West, the introduction of the deutschmark and the lifting of price controls in Marshall Plan Europe made available, according to the latter day Werkbund, a “false abundance” of goods and styles. With the U.S. government locked in an increasingly bitter ideological struggle with the Soviet Union, the home and its ma-terial goods emerged as the offensive front lines. The “contest between freedom and despotism,” according to Paul G. Hoffman, a Marshall Plan administrator,